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Harrisonburg Parks and Rec ready to celebrate 65 years

HARRISONBURG, Va. – It's time for 65 years' worth of celebrating.

The Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation Department will celebrate its 65th anniversary with a special community event on Saturday, June 1, at the Cecil F. Gilkerson Community Activities Center. The festivities will honor the department's past and all those staff members who helped make the Friendly City a better place by preserving green spaces and providing recreational opportunities over the past 65 years.

The event will begin with a special ceremony recognizing the first director of Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation, Cecil F. Gilkerson, at 11 a.m. in the Community Activity Center's lobby. All are welcome to attend.

"Where would we be today without Cecil's contributions," current Parks and Recreation Director Luanne Santangelo said. "He has dedicated his life to making Harrisonburg a better place for people of all ages, and we are honored to carry that mission forward every day in all we do to provide more opportunities for people to stay active and healthy while having fun."

The kickoff event, in addition to the special ceremony, will include a Klines Dairy Bar ice cream truck and Chanello's Pizza selling pizza and sodas, face painting, refurbished Knuckleball tables, throwback games, and entry to Westover Pool for only 65 cents. There also will be Parks and Recreation raffle giveaways every 30 minutes, including Heritage Oaks Golf Course free rounds of golf, or a free bucket of balls at the driving range; free room rentals; voucher for free classes; pool passes;



(Above) Kids sit on the rocket slide at Westover Park in July 1997. Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation will celebrate its history throughout the year, starting with Saturday's event.

memberships to the Community Activities Center and Lucy Simms Center; and free picnic shelter rentals.

“We’re excited to have this chance to celebrate our past with the Harrisonburg community, but also to start looking forward to all the great things to come.” Parks and Recreation Marketing & Special Projects Coordinator Brittany Clem said. “If you thought the first 65 years were great, wait until you see what all we do in the future!”

Formalized in 1954, the department was staffed by one full-time director and part-time employees. Park property owned by the City was a tiny 1.5-acre parcel. What a difference 65 years make? The department has grown to employ 48 full-time and more than 75 part-time staff members, and park property has swelled to more than 650 acres. This growth developed with a vision for the future and to position the department for continued success in meeting the needs and expectations of those in the community.

Visit www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/Parks-65-Anniversary for more information on the event, or www.HarrisonburgVA.gov/Parks-Recreation for more on the department and upcoming events.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to almost 55,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.

